Here's the original version of this review: https://web.archive.org/web/202403121...

I'm updating this on January 15 2025 and changing my original 3/5 to 1/5.

why?

Because Warrior Cats books take themselves more seriously than this does. Warrior Cats books also have more stakes and more commentary to make on anything than this does.

I enjoyed reading this book because I thought it was funny. But there's no worldbuilding. There's no descriptions for anything. And I *know* this author knows how to describe things, which means she was just purposefully being lazy in this one and forcing us, the readers, to have to do all the heavy lifting. And that’s just bad writing, flat out.

Here’s some of the reasons this book gets 1 star:

1) The author refuses to explicitly state that

Murderbot's pronouns are it/its. This story, and the series it started, is constantly touted as "amazing nonbinary/trans representation", but despite how many opportunities there are in this short story to have Murderbot explicitly state and choose its pronouns to be it/its, Martha Wells chooses to take the coward's way out, leaving a huge amount of the fandom misgendering Murderbot left and right, and insisting it's a man or a woman.

That also just makes it extremely confusing and frustrating to read this story, because you have no indication of how exactly you're supposed to refer to the character. It gets called "it" by the other characters, but those are the same characters who didn't even realize it was more than a toaster 5 minutes ago.

There's no indication anywhere of what pronouns Murderbot actually uses, because the way its referred to as “it” just seems like more dehumanization and insults from the bigoted slave-renting humans, so you finish the book...and you have no clue how you're even supposed to talk about this character. Because Martha Wells is lazy and cowardly and didn't want to

just have Murderbot say its pronouns are it/its.

This both gives her token representation points that kids with no standards will fawn over, AND allows her to quietly support anyone who chooses to misgender Murderbot even after they read the other books.

She's purposefully choosing not to tell us within the story what Murderbot's pronouns are and how we should describe it, so that she can get all the hype for ""nonbinary representation"" without actually having to support nonbinary people in any real way, and won’t have to put up any fuss when the announced Apple TV show probably decides to make it a cis guy. She gets all the praise and none of the problems. Just like she had official art where Murderbot has dark skin, but has put up no fight about the Apple TV show hiring the whitest white guy ever to play it.

Again, she gets all the praise for not-actually existant “diversity” but then doesn’t actually have to fight to uphold that diversity, because she didn’t actually write it.

It's the definition of performative activism. Nonbinary

people and people of color are literally just tokens to her to get people to read and praise her books and hand over their money, but when push comes to shove, she'll let us be misgendered and whitewashed and played by the whitest white guy ever, because apparently all she cares about is making money and being palatable to the lowest common denominator, despite all the faux-progressive set dressing.

It's also once again just more stereotypes. Martha Wells loves stereotypes. She hasn’t stopped writing them for decades. Murderbot is only nonbinary and aroace because it's a robot who doesn't have any secondary or primary sex characteristics. It’s literally just a dehumanizing stereotype that others real nonbinary and aroace people, and says we can’t possibly exist, because the only way to be nonbinary or aroace is to literally be a sexless robot.

Martha Wells also just loves causing unnecessary confusion by either making up brand new words to describe things that already have existing terms, like "android" and "robot", which she here says android = construct, robot = bot, or using existing words in a way they're not actually used, for seemingly no

reason except to be special. See, a short story (“Wolf Night”, which pretends to be a mystery but is not, because she doesn’t know how mysteries work) she wrote where she was throwing around the word "chimera" to mean "illusion spell" without a single sentence to just explain that. She literally just decided to make it unecessarily confusing for no reason at all besides thinking “going down the path less traveled” makes your story better. No, when it comes to things like this, it literally just makes it more confusing and worse.

She does that here in All Systems Red, throwing around acronyms and fake Scifi sounding words, apparently just because she thinks that's what scifi is. When that’s not how that actually works. And she never ever stops to just explain any of these things either, it's just pretentious and unnecessarily confusing, especially because we have nine whole characters we have to keep track of in this story for no good reason.

Seriously. There’s Murderbot, the narrator, and then eight whole human characters whose names we have to keep track of. None of them have any more

personality beyond the most shallow traits. Most of those eight humans have literally no personality at all, and just exist in the background to cause confusion.

There should have been, at max, 3 good guys in this book for us to keep track of. Murderbot, and two humans. That would have been manageable. That would have been few enough characters that they could actually get some personality to themselves where we could get to know them.

But instead we got eight of them, with not enough personality between any of them to make even one well developed character.

That is absurd. There are literally short stories with less than 10,000 words, a third shorter than this book, that have more characterization and character development. This is not a “short story problem” this is a Martha Wells problem. And all of her characters are like this, not just with The Murderbot Diaries. All of her protagonists may as well be the exact same character copy and pasted with a new name and sometimes new pronouns.

(because despite all the pseudo-feminist things she writes, her writing is in fact misogynistic, and she seems to hate just having female protagonists)

This is a short novel (around 30,000 words long), so all of the characterization and worldbuilding that is in it is important. But she decided to do none of that. We're on a completely alien planet for pete's sake. But we don't even get to know what color the sky is! It's written like bad fanfiction where the setting does not exist, it's just characters drifting through some undescribed void that the author expects you to imagine for yourself, because they can't be bothered to do it.

Apparently we're supposed to see this book as a serious grim story about slavery. But it does nothing but endorse slavery apologism once you get past the "quirky cute" vibes it wants you to take away.

6 slaves are murdered in this book. Only 1 of those 6 was murdered by the bad guys. We're supposed to think slavery is bad, but apparently that only applies when it's happening to the protagonist, and we don't even get shown any of the bad things, we're just told

it all totally happened offscreen, earlier, trust it.

It’s just absurd.

And again. Absolutely nothing is described to us. I can’t stress this enough. We get no descritions. She shoves 9 whole characters on us and can’t even be bothered to describe them.

We don’t even know what the dang protagonist looks like! She literally was too lazy to tell us what the main character looks like! It’s just bad writing!

There’s also absolutely no stakes in this story at all. It is impossible to take it seriously. There’s action scenes, where Murderbot gets seriously injured to the point it’s almost falling apart.

But then those injuries literally immediately get magically fixed like they never happened.

Literally three whole times in this one short book, Murderbot gets dramatically hurt, and then immediately gets fixed. No scarring, no residual pain, nothing. And it gets fixed completely between each

action sequence, too, so it’s not even like the fight before matters at all. They might as well not have happened at all.

There’s also a human character, Dr. Bharadwaj, one of those eight freaking humans we have to keep track of, who was seriously injured right at the opening scene to the book, and almost bled to death from injuries Martha Wells couldn’t be bothered to describe to us in any way.

I guess her leg got bitten. But we just don’t know. Because the author couldn’t be bothered to tell us. She wants us to have to do all the work of imagining and figuring out what’s happening.

And guess what? Dr. Bharadwaj also get magically cured! She’s back to normal before the book ends, with no long term consequences at all!

Martha Wells does this literally all of the time for all of her characters. She makes them get “injured” for cheap drama that will last maybe 5 pages if you’re lucky, and then magically fixes it, and there’s no consequences at all. No scars. No pain. Not even any

trauma surrounding those specific injuries.

It kills all stakes and meaning for the story, because you know nothing that happens in a fight will ever matter. Oh, and she never kills off any named character we're supposed to like, either, so there's no stakes there either.

This is just part 1 of a series that only gets worse the longer it goes on. She refused to tell us what Murderbot's actual pronouns are, making it frustrating and unecessesarily confusing to try and talk about the character. She just keeps doing slavery apologism. She refuses to have any actual stakes in the story. She refuses to describe anything, including the literal fights, forcing us to do all the hard work. She introduces a million and one named characters that we're expected to keep track of and care about, and never actually explains any of the words she just made up to confuse people.

It's bad writing. And it only gets worse as the series progresses. She's the kind of writer who will receive feedback about problems in her writing, and instead of learning to fix it, she'll just put some snarky

comment in the next book where you'll be a character that everyone thinks is stupid for saying the stupid thing. Seriously.

When confronted with problems in her writing, Martha Wells chooses to insult her audience rather than admitting she messed up. I can't give her the benefit of the doubt anymore. Anything positive I had to say about this book gets wiped away by the fact that Martha Wells refuses to learn from her mistakes and refuses to improve her writing on any front.

Especially because of the prices of these books. It's January 15 2025 and the publisher's running a scam of selling the first 4 books for $80. So absurd you'd think it's satire, considering these books pretend to think that capitalism is evil, while the apparently author has no problem with it IRL.